STAT Declassified in Part - Sanitized Copy Approved for Release 2011/12/21 : CIA-RDP90-00965R000100260032-1

STAT

ABC World News Tonight

25 February 1987

PETER JENNINGS:

We are going to begin this evening with the results of an ABC news investigation into what lengths the Reagan Administration has gone to in order to help the Nicaraguan contras when Congress was against it. This is a story of how the South African government was enlisted to help the contras with aircraft and flight crews. ABC's Karen Burns is the reporter.

KAREN BURNS:

ABC News has learned that for over three years United States Government officials and the South African government have been working together to provide military assistance to the contras. The operation has been described as a "Vest Pocket Operation" run by CIA Director William Casey himself, outside of all normal channels.

The meetings occurred during a period of intense Congressional debate over economic sanctions against South Africa, which the President ultimately vetoed, and Congressional opposition to US assistance to the contras.

The first direct contact:

State Department and intelligence sources tell ABC that the CIA's then Latin American Division Chief Duane Clarridge traveled secretly to South Africa to solicit aid for the contras, a trip the CIA denies. At the time, Clarridge reported directly to CIA Director William Casey and was the agency's point man for the contras.

Declassified in Part - Sanitized Copy Approved for Release 2011/12/21 : CIA-RDP90-00965R000100260032-1

Declassified in Part - Sanitized Copy Approved for Release 2011/12/21 : CIA-RDP90-00965R000100260032-1

Several months later, SAF Air Freighters, a South African cargo company, opened an office in the United States. US officials say SAF Air is involved in covert operations for the South African government. On the same day it incorporated, SAF Air signed a lease with Southern Air Transport known for its past relationship with the Central Intelligence Agency. SAF Air provided planes to Southern Air, planes which were used to fly weapons to the contras.

In 1984 the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency undertook a secret mission. On the French Riviera, CIA Director William Casey met with Saudi Arabia's King Fahd. Casey sought to persuade Fahd to provide covert aid for the contras in Nicaragua, for the rebels in Angola, and he urged Fahd to provide oil to South Africa.

Two years later, in March, CIA Director Casey made another secret visit, this time to South Africa. Sources tell ABC that during that period, a deal was being discussed in high-level policy sessions in South Africa and in Washington. The deal was South African assistance to the contras.

ABC News has learned that one month later, after Casey's visit to South Africa, retired Air Force General Richard Secord, his deputy Richard Gadd, and a man described by others present as Lt. Col. Oliver North, met with Southern Air Transport pilots in a safe house in San Salvador. There they were told that third country nationals would fly weapons into Nicaragua. American officials say that some of those nationals were South African.

At the same time, the debate over economic sanctions against South Africa was heating up. Congress voted for sanctions and Reagan vetoed them. He was later overridden, but press reports indicate that the South African government was pleased at the President's actions.

Declassified in Part - Sanitized Copy Approved for Release 2011/12/21 : CIA-RDP90-00965R000100260032-1

Declassified in Part - Sanitized Copy Approved for Release 2011/12/21 : CIA-RDP90-00965R000100260032-1

The CIA has denied that former Director William Casey solicited funds for the contras during the time when Congress considered it illegal. But Casey, the man intimately involved, is still too ill to comment. Karen Burns, ABC News, Washington.

Declassified in Part - Sanitized Copy Approved for Release 2011/12/21 : CIA-RDP90-00965R000100260032-1